

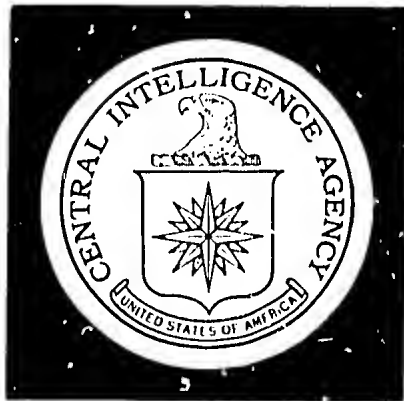
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Intelligence Memorandum

Logistical Developments In The Panhandle Of Laos

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December 1969

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
December 1969

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Logistical Developments
In The Panhandle Of Laos

Introduction

The US bombing program against the enemy's logistical system in the Panhandle of Laos during the 1968-69 dry season (October 1968 through May 1969) inflicted heavy and widespread damage and created significant resupply problems for the enemy. However, throughout the period the North Vietnamese were able to supply their forces in South Vietnam at a rate sufficient to cover current operational levels and to provide for the replacement of stockpiles.

During the 1969 wet season (June through September), heavier than normal Southwest monsoon rains and a continued high level of air attacks severely damaged roads throughout the Laotian Panhandle, and the enemy's throughput of supplies to South Vietnam was largely limited to the relatively small amounts he could move through or around the DMZ and draw down from stockpiles in Laos.

The low level of Panhandle traffic during the past wet season, however, was probably more a reflection of Communist decisions related to the war in South Vietnam than an inability to move supplies if the enemy had been determined to do so. For example, personnel infiltration through the Panhandle during the recent wet season was far below that of the comparable period a year ago. Enemy resupply requirements in South Vietnam also declined somewhat as a

Note: This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of Economic Research and was coordinated with the Office of Current Intelligence and the Director's Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs.

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[redacted]

result of a reduction in combat activities in
that area. [redacted]

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In mid-September, with the rainy season at an end, the Communists launched a major road repair and reconstruction effort throughout the Panhandle, clearly designed to restore the capability of the logistic system to the pre-rainy season level. In recent weeks there has been a sharp increase in truck traffic moving into and within the Panhandle, signaling the start of the 1969-70 dry season logistic campaign (see the chart). This memorandum assesses the degree to which the roadnet has been restored, the extent to which traffic flows have recovered (compared with the beginning of previous dry seasons), and some of the reasons why the Communists reactivated the system.

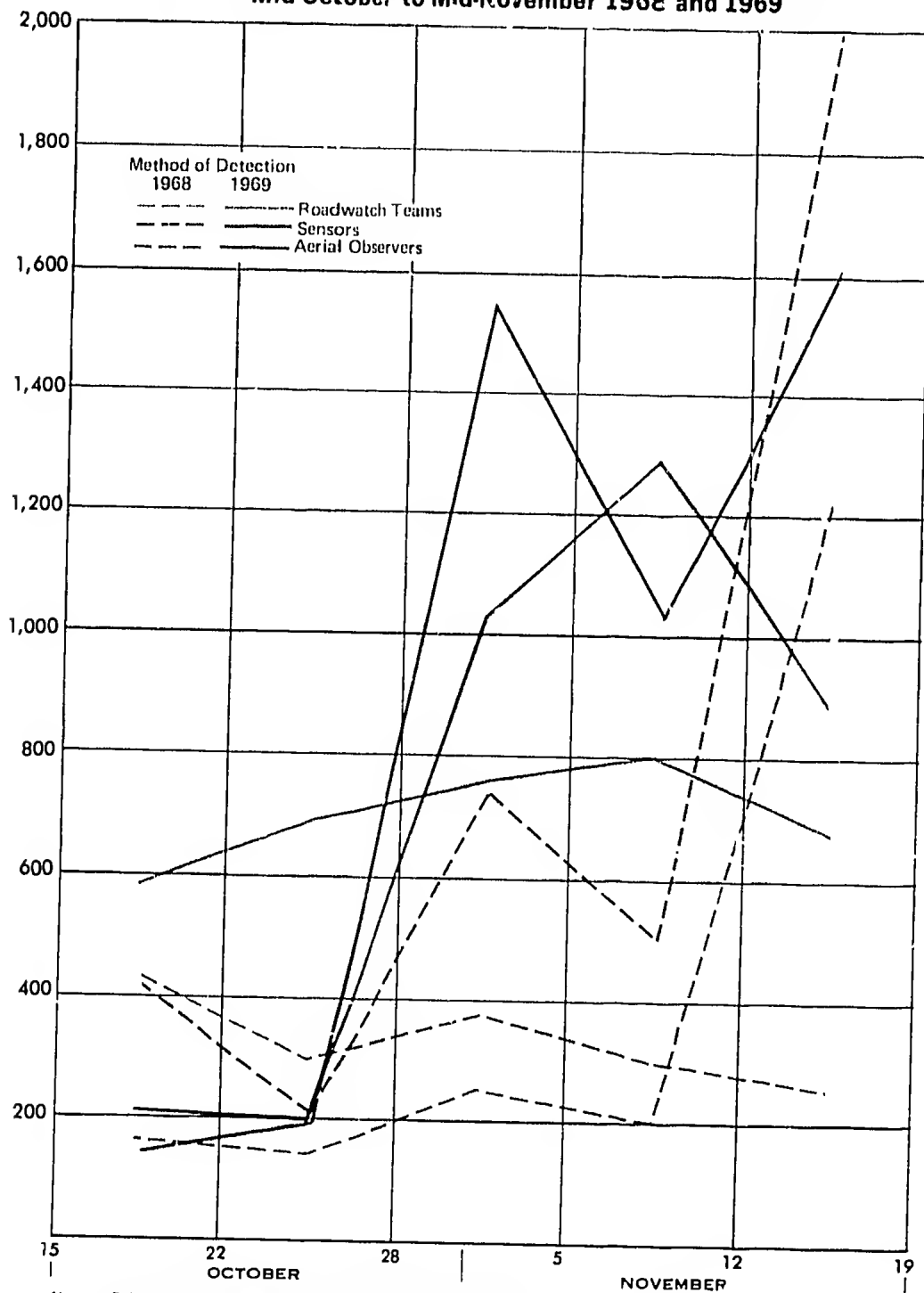
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ENEMY TRUCK DETECTIONS IN LAOTIAN PANHANDLE

Mid-October to Mid-November 1968 and 1969



Note: Points on graph represent weekly totals shown at mid-week.
 Numbers of trucks are shown without regard to direction of movement or location.
 Each method of detection includes unavoidable multiple counting.
 Sightings by aerial observers are a function of the level of attack and of weather conditions.

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Sources of Information

1. Several different sources, all with some merit and some weakness, provide information on the flow of supplies into and through the Communist logistical system in southern Laos. These include pilot sightings, sensors, [redacted] aerial photography, and roadwatch and guerrilla teams. Pilot reports of truck traffic are useful but are dependent on weather, the level of air operations, and the number of sorties flown at night. Sensor information gives indications of relative traffic levels but probably should not be used to count numbers of trucks, particularly in close-order convoy. [redacted]

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Aerial photography is dependent on weather and frequency of coverage and is limited to daylight hours. It is useful, however, in assessing the status and use of a roadnet over time. Roadwatch reporting by teams in southern Laos has been the most continuous source of reporting on enemy logistics activity since 1964. The quality of such reporting is dependent on the team's proper placement, length of stay on station, training, and dedication. Friendly guerrilla teams also provide information on the enemy's logistical system, particularly in the tri-border area.

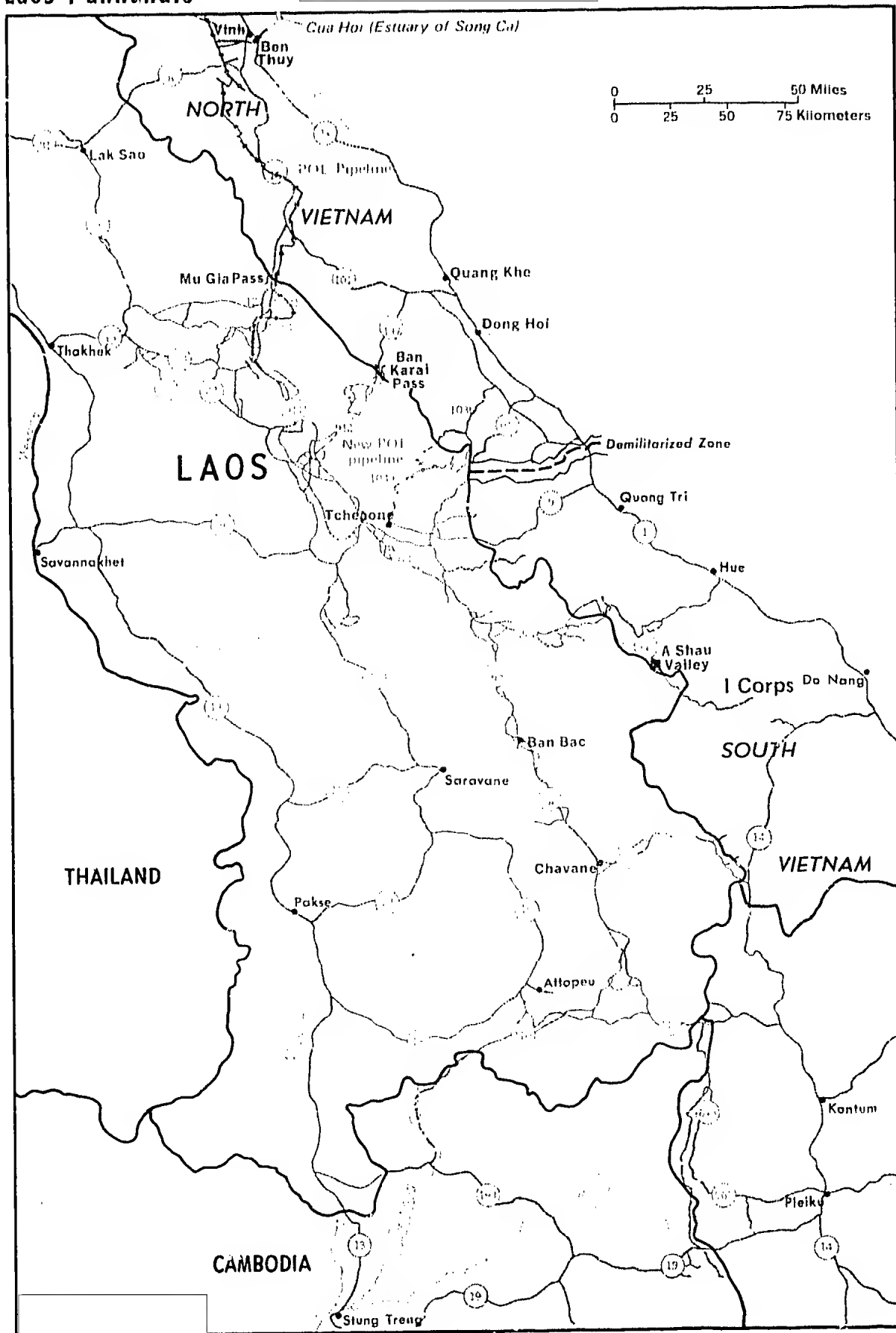
Road Conditions

2. The Communist road network in the Panhandle was in very poor condition at the beginning of this dry season, requiring considerably more effort to restore than in previous years. The expanded bombing campaign during the past year, coupled with heavier than normal monsoon rains during the wet season, left many of the roads eroded, pockmarked with water-filled craters, and blocked by landslides at frequent intervals. Analysis of aerial photography revealed that even the routes leading from Mu Gia and Ban Karai Passes (see the map) -- among the best roads in the Panhandle -- were closed to truck traffic for most of the wet season and that the enemy was making little or no attempt to keep them open. The roads between Tchepone and storage areas west of the A Shau Valley were the exception.

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Laos Panhandle



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Throughout the rainy season, aerial observation by Forward Air Controllers (FAC's) and aerial photography indicated road repair efforts and evidence of vehicle usage between those two areas, although even there vehicle traffic appeared to be limited to short-haul or shuttling operations between points at which the roadways were interdicted. Much of this traffic presumably was directed to transferring supplies from the large enemy warehouses at Tchepone to enemy concentrations in I Corps (via the A Shau Valley). South of Route 922, photo-analysis indicated that the main north-south arteries and exit routes into South Vietnam deteriorated rapidly after the onset of the rainy season.

3. The Communists began repairing the system in mid-September, starting with routes entering Laos from North Vietnam. Entry Routes 12, 912, and 1039 were among the first to show substantial evidence of manual and mechanized repair activity. By early October most of the routes as far south as Chavane were being worked on, and by late October some of the southernmost routes in the Panhandle were undergoing repairs. According to FAC reports, corduroy was being laid on long stretches of muddy roadbeds throughout the Panhandle. In addition, short bypasses were built around several road segments that had been completely destroyed.

4. Although the heavy monsoon rains ended during October, the seasonal transition period which extended through early November brought higher than normal rainfall. Despite the poor weather, however, road reconstruction on the Panhandle roads progressed at such a rapid pace that by mid-November some trucks were moving from North Vietnam as far south as the tri-border area. Repair activity is continuing throughout the Panhandle as additional road segments are made motorable to provide greater flexibility to the logistic system.

Aerial Observations

5. Pilot reports of truck sightings have clearly reflected the onset of the enemy's dry season logistic effort (see the Table). Sightings on the access routes into southern Laos from North Vietnam have been higher this year than in the beginning

Trucks Reported Sighted
by Pilots in Southern Laos

<u>Average Number per Day</u>			
<u>Year</u>	<u>Sighted</u>	<u>Attack Sorties ^{a/}</u>	<u>Ratio of Sorties to Truck Sightings</u>
1967			
Sep	9	43	4.78
Oct	32	75	2.34
Nov	142	116	0.82
1968			
Sep	30	70	2.33
Oct	34	131	3.85
Nov	147	384	2.61
1969			
Sep	8	204	25.50
Oct	28	175	6.25
Nov 1-15 ^{b/}	161	267	1.66
1968-69 dry season (Oct- May)	230	355	1.54

a. All attack sorties, including B-52.

b. Preliminary.

of the 1967 and 1968 dry seasons, despite a reduced sortie rate in the Panhandle compared with a year ago. During September, sightings south of both Mu Gia Pass and Ban Karai Pass were negligible, increasing to ten and six trucks a day, respectively, in October, and 20 and 30 trucks a day during the first half of November. Sightings below Ban Karai have been more than double the levels reported in past years. Virtually no trucks have been reported by pilots on Route 8 (Nape Pass) or on Routes 1036 and 1039 in the western DMZ.

6. Within the Panhandle, sightings on roads south of the access routes have been made largely on the feeder roads and bypasses leading to the main north-south arteries. In the central part of the Panhandle, pilot reports continue to reflect the importance of the Tchepone area as a logistic transfer point for supplies destined for South Vietnam. Sightings on Route 922 averaged some two trucks a day in November, about the same observed during 1968. South of Route 922 pilots have reported a slow but steady increase in the numbers of trucks (sightings increased from about one truck a day in the latter part of October to about 12 a day for the week ending 18 November).

Sensor Detections

7. Sensor detections, which had been extremely low from early July through the middle of October, began to rise during the last half of October and by the end of the month were higher than any time since June. As shown in the following tabulation, the sharp increase in detections this year took place some two weeks earlier than in 1968, although a part of the increase may be attributed to the larger number of sensors in place this season. Extensive seeding of new sensors began this season in early October and continued through mid-November. On 1 October there were almost 300 active sensors in the Panhandle; by 15 November the number had increased to more than 500. On 15 November 1968 there were only about 250 active sensors.

	Total Number of Detections per Week	
	1969	1968 <u>a/</u>
15-21 October	147	415
22-28 October	196	224
29 October-4 November	1,544	734
5-11 November	1,029 <u>b/</u>	501
12-18 November	1,603 <u>b/</u>	1,981
<i>Total</i>	<i>4,519</i>	<i>3,855</i>

a. Weekly periods used for 1968 begin and end one day later than those for 1969.

b. Preliminary.

8. From mid-October to mid-November, the vast majority of the detections were on the roads immediately south of Mu Gia and Ban Karai Passes. During the latter half of October, almost all the detections were on these routes, although, increasingly as the traffic density shifted southward during November roads in the central Panhandle between Routes 912 and 922 became prominent sources of detections. Only a few detections were recorded during the period on Route 922 and roads farther south which have been only lightly seeded with sensors.

Roadwatch Reports

9. Information from roadwatch teams along Route 15 (the access route from North Vietnam into Laos via Mu Gia Pass) indicated that, from 15 October to 14 November of this year, truck traffic moving into the Panhandle was clearly higher than in 1967 (see the tabulation, below). Because of the considerable difference in the number of days that teams were on station this year compared with 1968, it is more difficult to compare traffic flows in the two years. On balance, however, roadwatch reporting indicated a seasonal increase in traffic at a rate roughly comparable with 1968.

	<u>15 October - 14 November</u>		
	<u>1967</u>	<u>1968</u>	<u>1969</u>
Number of trucks southbound	340	364	422
Number of days the road was observed	31	19	30
Average number of trucks per day	11	19	14

10. On the other access routes, teams on Route 912 (Ban Karai Pass) reported 54 trucks moving southbound during the period from mid-October to mid-November, slightly less than the 62 trucks reported for the same period in 1968. Because of their location, however, teams on the pass in both years were unable to monitor all the trucks moving past them on bypass roads; thus, the level of traffic reported almost certainly was a minimum. Teams on Route 8 (Nape Pass) have reported some trucks (less than one a day) moving southbound past their positions since mid-October, but none farther south than Lak Sao, at the junction of Routes 8 and 81. (FAC reports indicate that the road south of the junction has shown no use.) No teams have been in position on the new southernmost access Routes 1036 and 1039 since March 1969.

11. In the southern Panhandle, roadwatch teams operating in a very hostile environment and less than optimally placed have reported light traffic south of Route 922, with less than one truck a day reported moving on roads south of Ban Bac. Other observations, however, particularly pilot sightings of trucks, indicate that traffic on Routes 92 and 96 has been increasing from week to week since mid-October.

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Guerrilla Team Reporting

15. During the June-September period friendly guerrilla teams in the tri-border area of south-eastern Laos detected practically no evidence of enemy truck activity. However, between mid-October and mid-November teams reported truck movements and related logistical activity on several occasions.

Petroleum Pipelines

16. The Communists are expanding their petroleum pipeline system in the Laotian Panhandle. Work continues on the main line, which extends from Vinh in North Vietnam through Mu Gia Pass some 30 miles into Laos. The enemy is also constructing a POL pipeline west of the DMZ. As of early December, segments of this pipeline had been traced in photography some 20 miles southwest of the North Vietnamese border in Laos. The general alignment and location of the confirmed segments suggest that the pipeline will extend from North Vietnam around the western end of the DMZ to Tchepone. As yet the pipeline has not been observed in North Vietnam, but to be effective the pipeline requires an entry point that can be supplied by waterborne carriers of bulk petroleum. The most likely such point of entry would be at either Quang Khe or Dong Hoi.

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17. There has recently been a report suggesting the possibility of a third pipeline in southern Laos. In late October an observer sighted a pipeline segment near Route 96, south of Ban Bac; subsequent bombing of the area caused large fires and explosions. The existence of this line has not been confirmed by photography and it may be a short line used by the enemy to connect small petroleum storage areas.

Supporting Logistical Activity in the North Vietnamese Panhandle

18. There has been increased logistical activity in the North Vietnamese Panhandle since about mid-October. Photographic coverage in October of the major access routes that lead into Laos revealed trucks in staging areas probably awaiting

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[redacted]

better road conditions on the routes below the passes. More recently, FAC aircraft operating over the North Vietnamese Panhandle have observed increased truck movements. [redacted] pilots reported sighting 150 trucks located on Route 15 in the area extending from Mu Gia Pass to about 6 miles into North Vietnam, and on Route 137 an estimated 200 trucks were seen north of Ban Karai Pass 10 miles into North Vietnam.

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19. A considerable increase in coastal shipping activity has also been noted in recent weeks.

[redacted]

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Increased shipping also was noted at Quang Khe and on the inland water-to-road transshipment points that lead southwest from Quang Khe to Route 137 leading to Ban Karai Pass.

[redacted]

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21. While the overall level of logistical activity in the North Vietnamese Panhandle is well above the very low levels noted during the wet-season months, it is still far below that of last year at this time. The two seasons, however, cannot be compared, because November 1968 was the first month following the total bombing halt in North Vietnam. At that time the enemy made a special resupply effort and was in the process of moving logistical bases from north of the 19th Parallel to southern Quang Binh Province.

Reasons for the Increase in Logistical Activity

22. There are a number of reasons why the Communists have again decided to expand logistical activity

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in southern Laos with the onset of the dry season. Stepped-up supply flows are necessary if the Communists are to make adequate preparations for the resumption of major ground operations in South Vietnam. In addition, the Communists have been called upon to expand supply deliveries to accommodate an increase in personnel infiltration/ [redacted]

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[redacted] Another important factor contributing to an increase in supply shipments is the need to replenish stocks in southern Laos and South Vietnam, which were drawn down as a result of the very limited amount of supplies that moved into and through southern Laos during the past rainy season [redacted]

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Conclusions

23. Despite bad weather and continued US bombing, the Communists have rapidly restored the capability of their logistic system in the Panhandle. Between early October and about the middle of November most of the major roads had been reopened to through truck traffic. During the period, the Communists concentrated their repair efforts on the main roads and used more heavy equipment than in previous years. Moreover, the efficiency of the enemy's road construction and repair forces has been enhanced by several years of experience in North Vietnam and Laos.

24. Since the latter part of October the North Vietnamese have moved quickly to reestablish a major

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flow of supplies into and through southern Laos. This has been evident in the increase in supporting logistical activity in the North Vietnamese Panhandle, and in the growing volume of traffic moving both through the passes from North Vietnam and on roads in southern Laos.

25. The upsurge in the level of logistic activity in southern Laos (as reflected by multiple intelligence sources) indicates that the Communists almost certainly plan once again to move substantial quantities of supplies through the system. Although it is still too early to make a definitive judgment on how the effort this year will compare with last year, the evidence available thus far suggests that the effort probably will be of the same order of magnitude.

26. The Communists have considerable incentive to maintain supply flows at a high level in the coming months in order to overcome the effects of US bombing, to rebuild stockpiles, to make preparations for winter-spring campaigns in South Vietnam, and to support the resumption of personnel infiltration.

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